

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1                   1.       A mail processing system, comprising:  
2                   a plurality of trays that are each adapted to hold a plurality of mail items,  
3 wherein the mail items in a tray are directed to a common recipient;  
4                   a plurality of mail processing machines that are adapted to process the mail  
5 items, wherein different mail items may take different processing paths through the plurality  
6 of mail processing machines; and  
7                   a tray tag generator that is configured to produce tray tags, wherein each of the  
8 plurality of trays is associated with a tray tag, wherein each tray tag includes recipient  
9 information identifying processing requirements relating to the recipient of the mail items in  
10 the tray associated with the tray tag.

1                   2.       The mail processing system of claim 1, further comprising readers  
2 configured to read information from the tray tags.

1                   3.       The mail processing system of claim 2, wherein the readers comprise  
2 bar code readers.

1                   4.       The mail processing system of claim 2, wherein the readers comprise  
2 emissive tag readers.

1                   5.       A mail processing system, comprising:  
2                   a plurality of trays that are each adapted to hold a plurality of mail items,  
3 wherein the mail items in a tray are directed to a common recipient;  
4                   a plurality of mail processing machines that are adapted to process the mail  
5 items, wherein different mail items may take different processing paths through the plurality  
6 of mail processing machines;  
7                   a plurality of tray tags, wherein each tray is associated with a tray tag that  
8 includes recipient information identifying processing requirements relating to the recipient of  
9 the mail items in the tray associated with the tray tag; and  
10                  a process management system that is configured to receive processing status  
11 information relating to the trays and output the information upon request.

1                   6.       The mail processing system of claim 5, further comprising at least one  
2 reader configured to obtain the process status information by reading information from tray  
3 tags.

1                   7.       The mail processing system of claim 6, wherein the reader comprises a  
2 bar code reader.

1                   8.       The mail processing system of claim 6, wherein the tray tag comprises  
2 an emissive tag, and wherein the reader comprises an emissive tag reader.

1                   9.       A mail processing system, comprising:  
2                   at least one mail processing machine;  
3                   a computing device;  
4                   software that programs the computing device to:  
5                   receive information relating to the status of a specific process segment  
6 of a tray of mail items; and  
7                   display the status of the specific process segment of the tray of mail  
8 items with respect to the mail processing machine; and  
9                   a tray tag associated with each process segment of a mail drop, wherein the  
10 tray tag includes recipient information identifying processing requirements relating to a  
11 recipient of the mail items in the process segment.

1                   10.      The mail processing system of claim 9, further comprising at least one  
2 reader configured to obtain process status information from the tray tag associated with each  
3 process segment in a mail drop.

1                   11.      The mail processing system of claim 10, wherein the reader comprises  
2 a bar code reader.

1                   12.      The mail processing system of claim 10, wherein the tray tag  
2 comprises an emissive tag, and wherein the reader comprises an emissive tag reader.

1                   13.      A method of processing mail items, comprising:  
2                   receiving a mail drop comprising a plurality of trays of mail items, wherein  
3 each tray contains mail items for a common recipient;

4 associating each tray with a tray tag, wherein each tray tag includes recipient  
5 information identifying processing requirements relating to the recipient;  
6 segmenting the mail into a plurality of process segments depending upon  
7 certain characteristics of the mail items;  
8 processing each of the plurality of process segments through different  
9 processes such that each process segment has a status with respect to its process;  
10 using the tray tag to periodically update at least one process segment's status  
11 information in a process management system, wherein the at least one process segment is  
12 from a particular tray; and  
13 using the status information of the at least one process segment to manage the  
14 processing of a different process segment from the particular tray.

1 14. The method of claim 13, wherein the tray tag includes a bar code for  
2 scanning the recipient information from the tray ticket.

1 15. The method of claim 13, wherein each mail item includes a remittance  
2 to the recipient.

1 16. The method of claim 13, wherein the mail is processed by a processor  
2 for the recipient according to particular processing standards, and wherein the processor  
3 receives compensation from the recipient based on the processor's performance with respect  
4 to the standard, and wherein the tray tags include information that identifies the processing  
5 standards for the recipient relating to the tray.

1 17. The method of claim 13, wherein the process management system  
2 comprises a computing device and software that programs the computing device to:  
3 receive information relating to the status of a specific process segment from a  
4 tray; and  
5 display information relating to the status of the specific process segment from  
6 the tray in response to a request from a user.

1 18. A method of processing mail items, comprising:  
2 receiving a mail drop comprising a plurality of trays of mail items;  
3 associating each tray with a tray tag that includes recipient information  
4 identifying processing requirements relating to a recipient of the mail items in the tray  
5 associated with the tray tag;

6                    processing the mail items through a plurality of processing steps; and  
7                    periodically using the tray tags to update the status of trays with respect to the  
8 processing steps in a processing management system.

1                    19.     The method of claim 18, wherein the step of periodically using the tray  
2 tags to update the status of trays with respect to the processing steps in a processing  
3 management system comprises reading information from the tray tags using a bar code  
4 reader.

1                    20.     The method of claim 18, wherein the step of periodically using the tray  
2 tags to update the status of trays with respect to the processing steps in a processing  
3 management system comprises reading information from the tray tags using an emissive tag  
4 reader.